

News Release



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City of Houston amends Historic Preservation Ordinance

HOUSTON, April 11, 2007 – Houston City Council approved changes to the Historic Preservation Ordinance making it easier for neighborhoods to establish a historic district and strengthened provisions designed to enhance preservation efforts.

Adopted by City Council in 1995, the ordinance recognizes and protects the city's historic sites. The ordinance allows Council to designate buildings, structures, objects or sites that have historical, cultural, architectural or archaeological significance. By preserving the city's valuable historic resources, residents and visitors are visibly reminded of our culture and heritage, boosting civic pride and economic prosperity.

"There is a growing awareness among Houstonians of our city's rich history, as well as an expressed interest in preserving that history. We have architectural gems, both large and small, in which so much of our city's extraordinary development took place. We have historic neighborhoods where the people who planted the roots for the dynamic city we know today created a sense of place, not only for their families, but for the entire community. These buildings and these areas continue to represent living history," said Betty Chapman, Chair of the Houston Archaeological and Historic Commission.

The first amendment would reduce the percentage required from 67% to 51% needed for owner support to initiate a historic district by petition. The simple majority is more in line with other preservation ordinances and will make it easier for neighborhoods to apply for historic designation.

The second amendment seeks to prevent historic sites from being demolished illegally. If a site is demolished without applying for a certificate of appropriateness from the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC), an owner may not obtain a building permit for two years. Previously, no provision was included for illegal demolition of a historic site designated by the City of Houston.

Third, any Certificate of Non-Designation must be considered by HAHC. If HAHC determines the building is worthy of designation, the certificate will not be granted for 180 days to protect the site while the HAHC considers initiation of designation, other alternatives for preservation

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are explored and public input is sought. A Certificate of Non-Designation is usually sought by an owner considering the demolition of a structure that may qualify for designation under the ordinance. Previously, these applications were handled by the Director of the Planning Department and were never considered by the HAHC.

The last amendment allows the notification of designation to be sent to property owners listed on the most recent city tax roll and to announce during the HAHC public hearing, the date of the public hearing before the Planning Commission. This change simplified the notification requirements and expedites the designation process for property owners seeking designation.

Economic incentives and reduced permit fees are available for renovations on designated historic properties approved by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission. More information is available online at the Planning Department web site at www.houstonplanning.com under Historic Preservation.

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